



THE GAP DECADE

* WHEN YOU'RE *TECHNICALLY*
AN ADULT BUT REALLY DON'T
FEEL LIKE IT YET . . .

KATIE SCHNACK



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *The Gap Decade* by Katelyn Marie Schnack.
Copyright © 2021 by Katelyn Marie Schnack.
Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.
www.ivpress.com.

CHAPTER ONE

SEASONS OF WAITING ARE HARD

Something really crazy happened to me when I was twelve. I met my husband, Kyle. And, even as a lanky preteen whose thinking was typically tainted by the constant cloud of Bath and Body Works Cucumber Melon body spray fumes I lived within, I knew the moment I saw him we were meant to be together, with a sense of clarity and complete peace. I knew he was my person. My lobster. Whatever you want to call it. Wild, right? And of course very cheesy. But there ya have it, folks. My love origination story is one big ball of cheese.

We were at a birthday party in our suburban Minnesota town. It was spring, and the air still had that damp chill to it yet was full of new life. Everyone seemed to be buzzing off the energy of knowing the snow was finally gone for good and summer was right around the corner. I was wearing the ugliest bright red hoodie possible with our high school logo on it—go Cardinals. Kyle was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and khaki cargo pants with pockets big enough to store a Nokia cell phone *and* a Walkman, which is very impressive. My hair was “scrunched” with so much Suave hairspray. Every natural curl was shellacked tight and



secure, as it could only be in 1999. Kyle's hair was bleached "blond," but it looked orange because that is what happens when a teenage boy does at-home highlights. It was plastered with so much product it stuck straight up to the heavens in spikes sharp enough to poke out multiple eyeballs at once.

I remember thinking how cute Kyle was. I remember how good he smelled—must have been all that hair gel. I remember every detail about that otherwise inconspicuous party—how my friend pierced her own tongue right there in the basement and I thought it was cool. (WHAT?) How we did a whole lot of nothing but it was just fun to be with each other. I remember the grass was so green and thick, and the sky was cloudy but the wind was calm. I remember the feeling in my stomach when I bounced on the trampoline in my friend's yard and when I looked at *him*—Kyle, my husband-to-be.

And yes, he was cute and all, but I think the part that really made him stand out to me as a prime choice in a future mate was when I accidentally spilled my can of Coke. Being the forever messy, way-too-fast-moving person that I am, I just put a phone book over the spill and continued on with my life. (ALSO, WHAT?) A minute later I looked back and saw he was cleaning up my mess with a dishrag. And yes, he has been doing so ever since, if you must know.

Late that night under the dark Minnesota sky and orange glow of a street lamp, Kyle asked me to be his girlfriend, because that is the cringeworthy question you ask when you are twelve. My answer was no, because clearly I was a progressive young woman and I need to *actually know* a person before signing up for such a serious commitment. My goodness, preteen Katie. Chill.

Five days later we went to a movie and barely spoke to each other the entire night. But before our parents rolled up to take us

home, he asked again. Apparently, our near-silent movie date was enough for me, and I said yes.

We stayed together all throughout high school. I kept waiting to get sick of him, or for us to grow apart, but it never happened. We only grew closer. Nobody could make me laugh as much as he did, and everything was so *easy* with him. He made me really happy; it was as simple as that. I didn't have a lot of experience with love, but I knew what I felt, and it felt real.

But life has ups and downs, and unfortunately being a kid doesn't shield you from that. Part of the reason we got so serious so fast was that we were forced to deal with some tough stuff really early on. When we were sixteen, Kyle's dad became very sick for several months and eventually died. Hospital visits, weepy phone calls, funerals, and navigating life after tragedy became part of our story. Then about a year later, Kyle collapsed at my house and was rushed to the emergency room. He had to have major surgery on his stomach and was in the hospital for weeks. I remember his terrible hospital breath, those hideous tan socks with the grippy bottoms the nurses put on him, and curling up with him in the bed as the tiny TV hanging from the ceiling quietly played in the background. My love for him during that time ran so, so deep. I was so worried about him and so in love with him. And so sick of hospitals. We were not even eighteen yet.

During our senior year of high school, we decided to go to separate colleges in the fall. Okay fine, I'll admit it! It was my stupid idea. Even though I loved him, I felt we had to be "rational." What did we really know about true love, right? We were still kids! We needed space. Right? Isn't that what they say in movies? Space? Even though part of my brain knew it was true, I refused to believe I actually found my soulmate at a random birthday

party when I was twelve. Things like that don't happen. I was basically asking God to prove to me this beautiful, amazing gift he had given me was actually real, and I did that by returning the gift to the store for a bit, which makes no sense.

So, off we went, me to school in West Palm Beach, Florida, and him to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which he hated. I mean, can you blame him? I had the beach, and he had a lot of roaming buffalos. It wasn't a fair split. That year was hard, as we were living thousands of miles apart. We didn't even have FaceTime then, and we could send about four texts a day before getting charged overage fees. We were living in the long-distance relationship stone age, and it wasn't working. So, we broke up. I guess we dated other people that year but . . . let's pretend we didn't and just not discuss that part. Yikes. It was all one dark, hot mess.

Then, things got even more complicated. That year I had made the most amazing best friend, Jenna, then tragically lost her in a car crash the day she was driving home for the summer.

The day after she died I flew back to Minnesota, and Kyle was waiting for me at the airport with my parents. I can still remember the looks on their faces as I descended the escalator toward them. Calm, placid, and bursting with worry just below the surface. Even though I had been pretty awful to him all year long, broken his heart, and ended something really good we had together, Kyle was there, handing me flowers, walking with me silently to the car, as he knew more than anyone there was nothing he could say to me to make anything better. That night he held me on the couch as I sobbed, and then every night that summer as the tears continued to fall. We were back together again right then, and we didn't even really need to discuss it. We just knew. And, we would never be apart again.

The next year Kyle joined me at my school in Florida. He grew his hair long and instantly became tan with his olive Danish skin. He began surfing and was once hit by a shark in the leg. We made all the same friends and worked together at the same swanky hotel serving mini crab cakes and caviar to socialites. We studied—I guess? It’s all a college blur. But mostly, we enjoyed being near each other again in the same state, the same life. Together, wrapped up tighter than ever before.

The older we got, the more interesting of a person he became to me. He was majoring in theater and could memorize entire scripts of Shakespeare in one sitting. He wore torn, dirty jeans—not as a fashion statement but just because he only owned one pair of jeans and wore them so much until they naturally became stylish. He sang Frank Sinatra and blared horrible musical theater cast recordings that made me want to rip my ears off but lit him up. Then he would jam out to Garth Brooks and rap every single word to Eminem. He got the most random tattoos—a bear with antlers growing out of it and a flock of bats flying out of his armpit. That one was on sale—only \$13, a Friday the Thirteenth special. I love anything cheap, including permanent body art. Kyle was so random and odd in the best ways yet also levelheaded where it mattered. We fit together even as we got older, just like we had from the beginning.

So, with all that drama and joy, heartache and tough stuff, tied up with the love we had for each other, it didn’t feel weird when he proposed at the age of nineteen. NINETEEN, PEOPLE. Yes, now I realize how ridiculous and young that is. But then again, maybe it isn’t. Hard to say. We felt like we had already lived through so much together and knew there was nothing we couldn’t handle together in the future. And even more so, there

wasn't anything we *wanted* to face without the other one by our side. We couldn't see our life without each other in it.

We got married at twenty-one, a few weeks after his birthday so he could legally drink champagne at the reception. Total babies. We wed in Minnesota in an old church next to a lake and then danced the night away at a quirky, musty country club with loud carpet and a million antique paintings hanging on the wall. High on a hill, overlooking the skyline of St. Paul, we celebrated with everyone we loved, and it was perfect. We felt perfect.

Life does this sometimes. It brings times of cutting heartache, sure, but then also times of pure joy. Easy, fun, beautiful seasons of life are not just a mythical unicorn, I promise. They do exist. It is easy to put a lot of focus on the hard times, but good times come around eventually. There are those moments when you look around and realize today, now, right here, things are just *good*. I have learned to savor those seasons, because they are equally as important and truthful as the hard ones.

After getting married, Kyle and I still had college to finish—one year for me, two for him. A victory lap! Turns out he surfed a bit *too* much that year he transferred down and had to retake some classes, and not all his credits came through from his first year in South Dakota. But I still blame the surfing. So, we moved into our campus married housing and began our life as husband-and-wife college students.

Our first home was a three-hundred-square-foot old converted garage with only two windows, one of them mostly taken up by an air conditioner unit. It was nestled under a huge mango tree and had that musty, old Florida smell to it. Sweet and swampy all at once. The house was so small I would joke that I could sit on my couch and make dinner at the same time, which would

almost be true if I had gigantic arms. Our table folded out from the wall, and then we folded it back in when we were done, and only one of us could fit in the bathroom at a time. To us, it was perfect. Our own mini piece of paradise, just for the two of us.

I know the first year of marriage is supposed to be hard, but since we got married so young and were still in college, we were shielded from a lot of the tough, true-life adult stuff that hits you after you graduate and several years after that. Things were still set up for us like college kids. We had health insurance through our school. I think our rent for our hut-disguised-as-a-home was about \$3 a month. We didn't have to pay our student loans back yet. We were both working—both still serving socialites at our college job, and then I had my first post-college job at the local news station, running cameras for the morning show. We had an awesome group of friends still surrounding us. We loved our church that we had been at for years. We had security, community, and each other. It felt like the most blissful way to enter into marriage. We were adults but still living in a college world, and we loved every minute of it together.

But we knew we couldn't hide in our little mango-covered nest forever. Eventually, the universe would kick us out and force us to face actual adulthood and purchase our own fruit from a store, not pick it from out our window. Kyle began applying for graduate schools to get an MFA in acting. We were looking at programs all across the country, all of them in cities we had never even been to before and where we didn't know anybody. It was exciting and terrifying all at once.

We had no idea what the next year of our life would look like, what state we would live in, or if Kyle would even get into school, which brought a whole second set of worries along. We were in one of those suspended twilight zone times where you know

everything is about to change, but you don't exactly know how, why, or even when, which can be the most difficult part. But change was coming, we could feel it. The reality of that began to blanket our days with the wondering, worrying, and wanting. And while we yearned in our guts for easy and quick answers to what was next, we had to wait. This was a full-blown adult 101 lesson for us: figuring out how to wait for something big without losing your mind in the process. Everything we knew and had grown to be comfortable with was about to be flipped in an entirely new direction, yet we didn't know if it would be up, down, east, or west. I wanted control over our destiny, but that wasn't possible, so we waited. And waiting is really hard.

It's hard when your heart wants to be ten steps ahead of where you are but you have zero idea how to get there, or where *there* even is. Waiting seasons can be agonizing, especially for people like me who are action-takers and want to quickly fix things and only feel good feelings along the way. Often, during these times of having to wait, it seems like God is silent, not listening, out to lunch. Because if he *wasn't*, wouldn't he be hearing our daily desperate prayers for an answer, for a change, for some sort of clarity, and our season of waiting would be OVER WITH BY NOW?

But of course, that isn't how things work. God isn't Amazon Prime. But I do think he knows a few more things than Jeff Bezos, so I am okay with trusting in his time schedule. Well, at least I try to be.

Over the next few years, Kyle and I would walk through several more long periods of waiting. Waiting to find out where our next move would be. Waiting to find if we would get the job, or any job for that matter. Waiting to find if we would have enough money. Waiting for new friends to come. Waiting for answers, for

darkness to lift, for resolutions. Just a lot of waiting. After college and through your twenties and thirties, there is a lot of uncertainty. So much effort and energy is put into trying to acquire things, figure things out, and get to the next page of your story when you just wish you could read the last chapter first to know how it is all going to end.

Now, looking back on the times when we felt we were running a marathon though we would have much preferred to take an Uber, it is easy to see how God was there all along. Every morning, he was there. In every anxious, mundane moment, he was there, whispering to me, “Hold on. I know what I am doing. My timing is perfect. I love you, and I have this figured out. Just trust me.” Sometimes I just forgot to listen for that whisper, but even then, it was still there.

I have seen in my life, and do believe with my whole heart, that if nothing else—if no fast answers are available, no quick fixes, no signs and wonders flashing in your face—God will in those moments give us enough to simply get through the day, if we ask him. And then get through the next, and the next, until we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel and know our season of waiting is about to end. Because it does end.

So, for Kyle and me, as we sat in our little garage house and tried to understand what the next decade of our life would look like, where it would bring us, and how we would survive, we fought hard to not think about everything we didn’t know and to focus on what we did. We had each other. We had joy that most days overtook our anxious thoughts. We had faith, though imperfect and evolving. And, for now, that was enough.

BUY THE BOOK!

ivpress.com/the-gap-decade



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com